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DISCOURSE ON METHODS.

BY- BOUCHER, JOHN G.

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THE AUTHOR STATES THAT BEFORE PRESENT FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS CAN BE DISCUSSED INTELLIGENTLY, THE RESEARCH IN PSYCHOLOGY AND LINGUISTICS WHICH HAS INFLUENCED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THESE METHODS MUST BE CONSIDERED. MANY FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS WERE BEGINNING TO FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH THE AUDIOLINGUAL APPROACH WHEN NOAM CHOMSKY, IN HIS 1966 NORTHEAST CONFERENCE REPORT, UPSET WHAT HAD BECOME FOR THEM THE STATUS QUO BY SERIOUSLY QUESTIONING MUCH OF THE WORK DONE IN LINGUISTICS IN RECENT YEARS. IRVING SALTZMAN ALSO DOUBTS THAT MUCH MORE IS KNOWN ABOUT FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER THAN BEFORE THE "REVOLUTION" WHEN THE GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION METHOD WAS PROMINENTLY USED. INSTEAD OF DEBUNKING THE RATIONALE SUPPORTING EITHER METHOD, OR WAITING FOR SOMEONE TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS WITH A RIGID SET OF METHODOLOGICAL RULES, THE TEACHER CAN BE SUCCESSFUL IF HE WORKS OUT HIS OWN OBJECTIVES WHILE DILIGENTLY KEEPING UP TO DATE ON THE RESEARCH BEING DONE IN HIS FIELD. THE TEACHER'S PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDE AND ACTIVITIES WILL HELP HIM REFINE HIS OWN TECHNIQUES. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN "FOREIGN LANGUAGE NEWS AND VIEWS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE," VOLUME 12, NUMBER 1, FALL 1966. (AS)

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CLIFFORD S. PARKER
Editor

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"DISCOURSE ON METHODS"

by

JOHN G. BOUCHER

Consultant, Foreign Language Education, State Department of Education, New Hampshire, at a Joint Meeting of the N.H. Chapters of the A.A.T.F. and A.A.T.S.P., November 5, 1966, at the University of New Hampshire

In my travels throughout the State I have come to realize that FL teachers are, above all else, concerned about methods. Under the circumstances, I suppose I must absolutely say something about "how to do it". But given the sophistication at which the FL profession has arrived, one cannot talk about methodology without first considering the research which has influenced it, especially in the fields of psychology and psycholinguistics. A third area about which I am very much concerned is professionalism and I should like to spend the last few minutes sharing with you my feelings on this point.

If someone were to ask you, as a foreign language teacher, what role you feel research has played in foreign language teaching as we see it today, you might point out, if you have been making any attempt at all to keep up to date on what is going on in your profession, that it has played a major role indeed. You might substantiate this statement by indicating that the audio-lingual method came out of research in linguistics, that psycholinguistics has given us new insights into how one learns a foreign language as well as one's maternal language, that research in such areas as programmed learning and student motivation have provided us with teaching techniques we had never heard of before the "revolution". If being able to say this makes you feel comfortable because at last you do have some final answers to the problems which have been plaguing you for years, stay a few minutes and allow me to upset your digestion.

In order to most effectively do so I shall refer you to two distinguished and nationally known researchers in the field of foreign languages, Dr. Noam Chomsky of MIT and Dr. Irving J. Saltzman, Indiana University.

It seemed, a year or so ago, as if the profession was, in fact, beginning to settle down after the trials and tribulations of the preceding decade. We knew that much still had to be done but we were starting to get used to our AIM and Ecouter et Parler textbooks. Even the so-called traditional texts were fast re-appearing in new audio-lingually inspired editions. And what should happen to us but Dr. Noam Chomsky of MIT! Allow me to refresh your memory by quoting a few passages from his article Linguistic Theory which appeared in the Reports of the Working Committees of the Northeast Conference of 1966. He said: ". . . it is difficult to believe that either linguistics or psychology has achieved a level of theoretical understanding that might enable it to support a 'technology' of language teaching", and he also said:

"What seemed to be well-established doctrine a few years ago may now be the subject of extensive debate." Here's another:

"Within psychology, there are now many who would question the view that the basic principles of learning are well understood."

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Those of you who were present at the Northeast Conference when Dr. Freeman Twaddell, well known linguist, so vehemently attacked Dr. Chomsky could, even though unsympathetic to his approach, at least understand his feelings if you also remembered this passage from Dr. Chomsky's article: "Linguists have had their share in perpetuating the myth that linguistic behavior is 'habitual' and that a fixed stock of 'patterns' is acquired through practice and used as the basis for 'analogy'."

Another researcher, Dr. Irving Saltzman, made the following statement during a tele-lecture delivered from Indiana University to six Foreign Language Regional Workshops in the State of Oregon on February 26, 1966:

"It is my strongly held conviction that almost every bit of advice that is offered to language teachers today about how to teach their languages effectively should be listened to very critically, and accepted, if accepted at all, only with great caution. Although many different groups of people, including experienced language teachers, like most of [illegible], and interested, but inexperienced outsiders, like me, have strong personal opinions on how to teach second languages, there is little included among the bits of gratuitous advice that is other than unsubstantiated, subjective collections of contradictory and ambiguous generalities."

Several amongst you may be familiar with the great research achievement of Drs. George A. C. Scherer and Michael Wertheimer in which an attempt was made to compare the relative effectiveness of the audio-lingual method and the traditional grammar-reading method. This report was published in 1964 and would seem to corroborate the observations of Chomsky and Saltzman. The results of the study, in fact, showed, among other things, that at the end of the first year the audio-lingual students were better in listening and speaking, but worse in reading, writing and translation. At the end of the second year, the audio-lingual students were still better in speaking, but poorer in writing and target language-to-English translation; they were not different in listening, reading, or English-to-target language translation. A combination score, weighing audio-lingual and non-audio-lingual skills equally, was computed to assess any grand total differences; the two groups were not significantly different in this overall proficiency index at the end of any of the four semesters.

If we believe, and I think rightly so, that methodology is the child of research, then, you may ask, where in the name of Nelson Brooks are we going? Is there no hope at all? Did we allow ourselves to become disillusioned with the grammar-translation method only to have our new hopes also proven inadequate?

Dr. Saltzman says this: "No one, not the experienced language teacher, not the erudite linguists, not the experimental psychologist, not the professor of education, not the producer of language records, and not the for-hire native tutor, no one today knows <u>the</u> best way to teach foreign languages. The data upon which decisions about procedural rules could be based have not been collected, or they are inconclusive."

I promised you a few minutes ago I would say something about "how to do it", about Methods, but before I give you my personal views, permit me to share with you Dr. Saltzman's advice to the forlorn teacher. "The advice," he says, "is in the form of a simple guiding principle. The principle is this: Teach your students what you want them to learn. If you want them to learn to speak, only, then teach them speaking. If you want them to learn to read, only, then

teach them reading. If you want them to learn both, teach them both. The issue of which one to teach first is not an important issue as long as you do teach both. It is important only when you don't have time for both and the one that is supposed to be second is never taught at all. Years ago, under the grammar-translation system, a major complaint about our language students was that they could not speak the foreign languages they had studied. But that should not have been surprising. The students were not being taught to speak. Today, after a few years of the audio-lingual vogue, the complaints are starting to be heard that the students can't write or spell in the foreign languages, which should not be surprising either. However, I will find it surprising if the eventual solution to this problem does not turn out to be a middle of the road compromise, a combination of both the audio-lingual and the grammar-translation methods."

Though no one could argue that this makes sense insofar as research seems to have proven true what would appear to be a truism in the first place, it is the kind of advice which, if not carefully qualified, is too pat, too easy on the teacher. It lets him off the hook. It provides him with justification for not having to think. After all, hasn't he heard this kind of advice so many times before? A middle-of-the-road compromise has been his way of life in the classroom for years. Speak the foreign language once in a while, explain some grammar rules, teach dialogues, give dictations, teach vocabulary items, and so on,--whatever most conveniently suits the moment.

I prefer what Professor William Bull, linguist at the University of California, told us. He said:

"The 'new look' in teaching is already 'old hat'. We need to think in terms of a continuing learning process for every classroom teacher. Pipelines to the sources of change stress the need to watch over detailed change rather than profession-wide fads or pseudo-revolutions. There is no master plan, only the mastery of the fine points of the art." Therein, he added, lies the difference between following "the" method and being successful.

I hasten to make clear at this point, if clarification need indeed be made, that I am not attempting in any way to debunk the rationale supporting the audio-lingual philosophy. The "new key" has opened our minds and made us see that the idea of bilingualism for Americans is within the realm of attainable ideal. Professor Adrienne Rogers of Russell Sage College published an article in the latest issue of French Review. I recommend it highly to all of you. In it, she says: ". . . while one must always expect a certain pendulum motion of redress, it seems reasonably clear that there will be no Restoration of the grammar-translation-reading syndrome: the audio-lingual Revolution has come; it is here to stay." To that I say amen!

If there are some amongst you, however, who have been waiting for the Revelation, I must regrettably tell you there will be no Messiah. There will not be brought forth a set of methodological rules which, if rigorously and blindly followed, will automatically give you a winner every year at the AATF Contest and/or 700 college board scores in sufficient numbers to keep principal and parents equally jubilant. I am convinced this will never happen because genuine success must come from within. It has never, in my experience, come to the foreign language teacher who waits for someone else--linguist, textbook writer or State Consultant, to name a few--to do his thinking for him. And this brings me to a subject very dear to my heart: professionalism.

I shall refrain from giving you Webster's definition of the word. I would rather take those few seconds to tell you first what professionalism is not (examples taken from real life!). It is not refusing to go to an NDEA Institute because it would be too much like going back to school. It is not considering weekends, from Friday 3:00 p.m. to Monday 8 a.m. as sacrosanct and not to be violated by such disturbing activities as workshops or foreign language meetings. It is not refusing to attend a summer institute because one's spouse will not allow it for any number of reasons, some of which would tax your imagination. It is not spending a great deal of time in French I explaining grammar rules in English and drilling verb paradigms or slaving over word-for-word translations of Don Quixote in Spanish III because one did not realize it could be done differently, never having read an issue of Modern Language Journal, Hispania, French Review or, heaven forbid, Polyglot, or any other professional literature for that matter. You think I exaggerate? I assure you I do not.

Our professional salvation lies in developing an attitude, an inner motivation which makes situations such as I have just mentioned not only undesirable to us, but just plain unthinkable. If we are to believe that there is no such thing as "the" methodology, then we must conclude that each teacher must find his own methodology, one that works for him and will produce the results he wants. He needs to work out his own objectives, and as he strives to attain these goals, so refine his technique from year to year that, for him, teaching ceases to be an unthinking application of methods worked out by someone else, and slowly but surely becomes an art. Van Gogh and Renoir were both great artists though their methods and techniques were quite different. They did have one thing in common, however, a driving dedication to the search for the ideal.

Research and linguistics have undeniably given us and will provide us in the future with new insights into foreign language teaching. But the techniques these disciplines suggest will only be valuable to the extent the teacher is willing to examine them critically and accept or reject them on the basis of his own clearly and honestly thought out objectives.

I would like to quote Dr. Chomsky once more. He says, in the same article previously mentioned: "In general, the willingness to rely on experts is a frightening aspect of contemporary political and social life. Teachers, in particular, have a responsibility to make sure that ideas and proposals are evaluated on their merits, and not passively accepted on grounds of authority, real or presumed. The field of language teaching is no exception. It is possible--even likely--that principles of psychology and linguistics, and research in these disciplines, may supply insights useful to the language teacher. But this must be demonstrated, and cannot be presumed. It is the language teacher himself who must validate or refute any specific proposal."

The techniques are there for the teacher's use. They will be getting better and more refined with time, but they are only tools--and like the tools of any trade, cannot be used masterfully without a long, demanding, and almost always frustrating apprenticeship.

Thank you for your kind attention and please call on me whenever you feel I might be of service.

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